

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN**

CHRIS J. JACOBS, III,

Plaintiff,

-vs-

Case No. 07-C-55

SECRETARY MATTHEW FRANK,

Defendant.

DECISION AND ORDER

Plaintiff Chris J. Jacobs, III, a Wisconsin state prisoner, lodged a *pro se* civil rights complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging that his civil rights were violated. This matter comes before the court on the plaintiff's petition to proceed *in forma pauperis*.

The plaintiff is required to pay the statutory filing fee of \$350.00 for this action. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). If a prisoner does not have the money to pay the filing fee, he can request leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. To proceed with an action *in forma pauperis*, the prisoner must complete a petition and affidavit to proceed *in forma pauperis* and return it to the court with a certified copy of the prisoner's trust account statement showing transactions for the prior six months. The court then assesses and, when funds exist, collects from the plaintiff at the time the action is filed an initial partial filing fee of 20% of

the average monthly deposits to or the average monthly balance in the prisoner's trust account for the six-month period immediately preceding the filing of the complaint.

In this case, the plaintiff has filed a certified copy of his prison trust account statement for the six-month period immediately preceding the filing of his complaint. The prisoner has been assessed and paid an initial partial filing fee of \$1.53.

The court is required to screen complaints brought by prisoners seeking relief against a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The court must dismiss a complaint or portion thereof if the prisoner has raised claims that are legally "frivolous or malicious," that fail to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or that seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

A claim is legally frivolous when it lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989); *Hutchinson ex rel. Baker v. Spink*, 126 F.3d 895, 900 (7th Cir. 1997). The court may, therefore, dismiss a claim as frivolous where it is based on an indisputably meritless legal theory or where the factual contentions are clearly baseless. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327. "Malicious," although sometimes treated as a synonym for "frivolous," "is more usefully construed as intended to harass." *Lindell v. McCallum*, 352 F.3d 1107, 1109-10 (7th Cir. 2003) (citations omitted).

A complaint, or portion thereof, should be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted if it appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of the claim or claims that would entitle him to relief. *See Hishon v. King & Spalding*, 467 U.S. 69, 73 (1984) (citing *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)). In reviewing a complaint under this standard, the court must accept as true the allegations of the complaint in question, *Hosp. Bldg. Co. v. Trs. of Rex Hosp.*, 425 U.S. 738, 740 (1976), construe the pleading in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, and resolve all doubts in the plaintiff's favor. *Jenkins v. McKeithen*, 395 U.S. 411, 421 (1969).

To state a claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, plaintiffs must allege: 1) that they were deprived of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States, and 2) that the deprivation was visited upon them by a person acting under color of state law. *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980). The court is obliged to give the plaintiff's *pro se* allegations, however inartfully pleaded, a liberal construction. *See Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972).

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) provides that a complaint must include only "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." This statement must simply "give the defendant fair notice of what the plaintiff's claim is and the grounds upon which it rests." *Swierkiewicz v. Sorema N.A.*, 534 U.S. 506, 512 (2002) (quoting *Conley*, 355 U.S. at 47); *see also Thomson v. Washington*, 362 F.3d 969, 970-71 (7th Cir. 2004) (no heightened pleading requirement for *pro se* prisoner civil rights

complaint). Of course, if a complaint pleads facts that show that a plaintiff does not have a claim, the complaint should be dismissed “without further ado.” *Thomson*, 362 F.3d at 970.

The plaintiff is incarcerated at the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility. He is suing Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Matthew Frank. The plaintiff alleges that the DOC’s \$200.00 yearly legal loan limit is denying him access to the courts and that the \$200 limit has not been adjusted for inflation. According to the plaintiff,

In 2004, I had to resort to using the back of state forms and other paper and envelopes sent to me from my family to be able to litigate. I had to do all copies, including my briefs by hand which has caused injury to my arm. At this prison (and other prison also) I’m not allowed to have envelopes sent into prison.

(Compl. at 6.) He asserts that the “\$200.00 yearly legal loan hinders meaningful litigation and has raised [sic] to the level of being denied access to the courts.” *Id.* For relief, the plaintiff seeks to “raise the \$200.00 yearly legal loans to meet to todays price of living standards.” *Id.* at 7.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections legal loan provision provides:

DOC 309.51 Funds for legal correspondence and copying. (1) Correspondence to courts, attorneys, parties in litigation, the inmate complaint review system under ch. DOC 310 or the parole board may not be denied due to lack of funds, except as limited in this subsection. Inmates without sufficient funds in their general account to pay for paper, photocopy work, or postage may receive a loan from the institution where they reside. No inmate may receive more than \$200 annually under this subsection, except that any amount of the debt the inmate repays during the year may be advanced to the inmate again without counting against the \$200 loan limit. The \$200 loan

limit may be exceeded with the superintendent's approval if the inmate demonstrates an extraordinary need, such as a court order requiring submission of specified documents. The institution shall charge any amount advanced under this subsection to the inmate's general account for future repayment. An inmate may be permitted to retain in the inmate's general account an amount of money specified, in writing, by the bureau of adult institutions that is not subject to repayment of the loan.

Wis. Admin. Code § DOC 309.51(1).

In order to state a cognizable access to the courts claim, a complaint must "spell out, in minimal detail, the connection between the alleged denial of access to legal materials and an inability to pursue a legitimate challenge to a conviction, sentence, or prison conditions." *Pratt v. Tarr*, 464 F.3d 730, 732 (7th Cir. 2006) (citing *Marshall v. Knight*, 445 F.3d 965, 968 (7th Cir. 2006)). The plaintiff premises an access to the courts claim on the DOC's failure to increase the amount set forth in its legal loan provision so that the amount is consistent with the rate of inflation. However, the plaintiff does not identify any court case in which he was prejudiced due to the \$200 yearly limit, which, by the way, may be exceeded if an inmate demonstrates an extraordinary need.

Even if the complaint had alleged that the DOC's \$200 legal loan limit caused the plaintiff to lose a case or suffer some other legal setback, the state of Wisconsin is under no constitutional obligation to provide the plaintiff with any assistance in pursuing his civil litigation. *Lindell v. McCallum*, 352 F.3d 1107, 1111 (7th Cir. 2003). There is "no constitutional entitlement to subsidy" to prosecute civil lawsuits. *Lewis v. Sullivan*, 279 F.3d 526, 528 (7th Cir. 2002). Moreover, prison officials are free to place restrictions on the

receipt of funds as they wish. *See Kaufman v. Frank*, No. 06-C-205, 2006 WL 1982692 (W.D.Wis. July 13, 2006). As the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit has advised, the provision of legal loans pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § DOC 309.51(1) "is a matter strictly between [a prisoner] and Wisconsin, and not any business of the federal courts. *Lindell*, 352 F.3d at 1111.

Based on the foregoing, the court finds that this plaintiff has provided no arguable basis for relief, having failed to make any rational argument in law or fact to support his claims. *See House v. Belford*, 956 F.2d 711, 720 (7th Cir. 1992) (quoting *Williams v. Faulkner*, 837 F.2d 304, 308 (7th Cir. 1988), *aff'd sub nom. Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989)).

ORDER

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* (Docket #2) be and hereby is **GRANTED**.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this action be and hereby is **DISMISSED** pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A(b)(1) for failure to state a claim.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Court document that this inmate has brought an action that was dismissed for failure to state a claim under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A(b)(1).

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Court document that this inmate has incurred a "strike" under 28 U.S.C. §1915(g).

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections or his designee shall collect from the plaintiff's prison trust account the \$348.47 balance of the filing fee by collecting monthly payments from the plaintiff's prison trust account in an amount equal to 20% of the preceding month's income credited to the prisoner's trust account and forwarding payments to the clerk of the court each time the amount in the account exceeds \$10 in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The payments shall be clearly identified by the case name and number assigned to this action.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Court enter judgment accordingly.

IT IS ALSO ORDERED that a copies of this order be sent to the warden of the institution where the inmate is confined and to Corey F. Finkelmeyer, Assistant Attorney General, Wisconsin Department of Justice, P.O. Box 7857, Madison, Wisconsin, 53707-7857.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that any appeal from this matter would not be taken in good faith pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) unless the plaintiff offers bonafide arguments supporting his appeal.

Dated at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this 23rd day of April, 2007.

SO ORDERED,

s/ Rudolph T. Randa

HON. RUDOLPH T. RANDA
Chief Judge